



AN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE
COLORADO RIVER WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Xeriscape™

Residential outdoor watering is often one of the first targets of water conservation measures when water is in short supply. Depending on the size of the yard, watering lawns and gardens can more than double the volume of indoor domestic water use. To reduce the amount of water necessary to keep outdoor landscaping alive and flourishing in an arid environment, a new way of looking at landscape design was developed called Xeriscape.

Xeriscape (pronounced zer-i-scape, NOT zero-scape) originated in Colorado in the early 1980's as part of a collaborative process between the landscaping industry and water providers. Recognizing the arid nature of the state and the limited water resources available, the team demonstrated how beautiful landscaping could be designed that required less water. Given the expense of the large amounts of water necessary to keep non-native landscaping green, decreasing outdoor water consumption becomes a money-saving proposition.

A basic set of principles governs Xeriscape, none of which revolve around ripping out all your grass and replacing it with lifeless bark dust or marble chips. They are:

- **Think first!** – Most urban and suburban landscapes are based upon covering over every inch of soil with grass and not even giving it a second thought. The first principle of Xeriscape is to come up with a plan and design. Where do you need grass? Where would shade be beneficial? Where could larger plants provide privacy? With a plan, landscaping can provide more pleasurable benefits than simply being something to mow every weekend.
- **Create practical turf areas** – Limit grass to where it makes sense, using appropriate grass varieties. Replacing little-used areas of grass with other forms of landscaping can reduce the amount of time spent maintaining the yard.
- **Select plants that require less water** – Take a look at the water requirements of the plant species you intend to plant and select those that need less water and therefore effort to keep alive and beautiful.
- **Amend the soils** – Colorado soils are frequently of poor quality for growing lush vegetation. By adding organic materials to improve soil quality and properly working the soil, plants and grasses can grow more easily, requiring much less water.

- **Use mulches** – Mulches protect the soil around plants, keeping roots cool under Colorado’s intense sunshine, retaining soil moisture and reducing incidence of weeds.
- **Use water efficiently** – Many Colorado residential landscapes are over-watered, creating shallow roots systems that easily dry out. Examine your outdoor watering habits and use only what is needed. Avoid high-pressure irrigation systems that spray a fine mist and have high evaporative losses. Instead, use more effective lower-pressure systems that spray more effective large droplets.
- **Maintain landscaping properly** – Set your lawnmower to the proper height, since grass cut too short requires more water. Weeding eliminates pesky vegetation that takes water away from the plants you want. Do not over-fertilize. Most homeowners use more pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides than are necessary, making life difficult for plants and lawns and creating pollution problems when the excess chemicals run off into the state’s waterways.

For more information about Xeriscape, contact your local nursery or landscape professional, or click onto the following websites:

- www.xeriscape.org , or
- www.crwcd.org/watmarks for a list of over 25 websites covering water conservation and Xeriscape.

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